

## THE COLLABORATION OF NUMISMATICS AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE DATING OF CELTIC COINS

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As shown by the finds from the Dřemčice village in North Bohemia, even confrontation of available numismatic and archaeological sources and approaches often do not lead to unambiguous and correct chronological conclusions. Therefore, in cases of unknown or unclear finding context, it is important to apply all available methods based on typological, iconographical, metrological, metallographic data and other criteria. In selected cases, analyses of the artistic aspect of Celtic coins and their pictorial elements in the context of decoration of contemporaneous archaeological artefacts also seem to be of interest. To verify the approach, we selected a Celtic coin from the earlier phase of Central European Celtic coinage and we compared it with decorations of a Hungarian style sword.

Keywords: Moravia, Bohemia, Slovakia, La Tène Period, Celtic coins, Celtic art.

### INTRODUCTION

Due to the absence of written sources and scarcity of Celtic coins with a reliable context of discovery, the dating of Celtic coins is a laborious process that will not end even if new finds become available. Therefore, whenever the archaeological material allows, contrasting numismatic and archaeological sources may contribute to specifying both relative and absolute chronology of the coins.

An example of such a process in the Central European Celtic numismatics is evidenced by a thorough work done by K. Castelin – a numismatist – and J. Waldhauser – an archaeologist (*Castelin/Waldhauser 1981–1984*). Together, the researchers confronted numismatic material, represented by small silver coins with horses and one gold coin with a boar, with a collection of archaeological finds from the La Tène settlement located to the west of the Dřemčice village in Litoměřice district.

Karel Castelin analysed three silver coinages – the first obol (*Kolníková 2012*, annexe 1, 183, type C; *Militký 2018*, 86–89, type II: 29, var. 1/2 – Horoměřice/Dřemčice; 190, 191, II/29.1/2 (1); 370, 96/2; 407, pl. 25, 96/2), the second obol (*Dembski 1991*, 6, 7, type Roseldorf/Němčice II; *Kolníková 2012*, annexe 1, 182, type/var. Bi; *Militký 2018*, 103–106, 246, 247, 370, 407, the type with a boss/horse; II: 43.4/1 (1); pl. 25, 96/3), and the third obol of the Karlstein type which in the European context is known in numerous local variations. Originally, it was named by K. Pink (1958) after a Southern Bavarian site – Karlstein – near Salzburg. Based on the contemporary numismatic knowledge and published finds, K. Castelin assumed that silver coins with a horse were used by

inhabitants of the settlement located to the west of Dřemčice in the second half or the last third of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE, i.e. in the LTD2 stage (*Castelin/Waldhauser 1981–1984*, 15, 19).

In contrast to Castelin's dating, J. Waldhauser characterised the collection of other archaeological finds from Dřemčice as '*belonging to the stages LTC1–LTD1, thus in 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, most likely before the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century*'. However, under the pressure of the numismatic dating, Waldhauser assumed that '*from the archaeological perspective, it seems likely that in the last third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, silver Celtic coins were no longer in circulation in today's Czechia, Celtic oppida had been abandoned and the settlement in the entire region was clearly Germanic*'. Therefore, according to Waldhauser '*silver coins, metal items and traces of blacksmiths works should be attributed to the times around or shortly after 50 BCE*' (*Castelin/Waldhauser 1981–1984*, 4, 14–20).

A large number of new finds of coins after 1990 – including previously unknown types and variations of small silver coins with a horse – mainly from areas linked with one of the branches of the amber trail, passing from Polish Silesia through lowland Moravia and the juxta-Danubian region to the south – showed that even the confrontation of numismatic and archaeological sources does not provide an unambiguous chronology of small silver coins from the Celtic settlement located to the west of Dřemčice. At least not the one that could be accepted both by numismatists and archaeologists. According to the extant knowledge, the first type of obol from Dřemčice was minted in the Middle La Tène stages LTC1–LTC2, i.e. between 260/250–190/180 BCE (*Militký 2018*, 86–89) or between

the first half and the beginning of the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE (Kolníková 2012, 53). According to J. Militký, the second type of obol from Dřemčice should be associated with the LTC2 horizon – i.e. between 190/180–130/120 BCE (Militký 2018, 106). Finally, the third obol – of the Karlstein type – was lost and cannot be dated more precisely than generally back to the LTD stage.

As shown by the finds from Dřemčice, even the confrontation of extant archaeological and numismatic knowledge does not necessarily lead to unambiguous chronological conclusions. Thus, to obtain the most reliable dating of items found in unknown or unclear contexts, it is necessary to use all available methods including typological, iconographic, metrological, metallurgic or other findings. In selected cases, the artistic consideration of visual aspects of Celtic coins in the context of contemporary archaeological artefacts seems also an appropriate supplementary analysis. To verify the possibility of dating Celtic coins that lack necessary contextual details, the present paper discusses selected examples of Celtic coins from the older phase of the Central European Celtic coinage (3<sup>rd</sup>–mid-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE).

#### GOLD COINAGE ATTRIBUTED TO THE ATHENA ALKIDEMOS GROUP

**1/24 stater of the type bird-like featured head/warrior's figure** (Fig. 1), Au, 0.327 g, 5.9/5.7 mm, 3 h, site Němčice nad Hanou, private collection, no. 5350.

Obverse: a left-facing head with clearly stylised bird features and a large, almond-shaped eye. The top of the head is adorned by a headdress arranged in several strands flowing down from a clasp on the neck into a loose arch. A legible beard is oriented upwardly and ends with a small indent at the nose height.

Reverse: a left-facing figure of a belted warrior holding a shield in an arm extended forward. The shield is decorated with a symbol resembling the letter  $\Lambda$ . In the second hand – raised over the head – the warrior holds a short stabbing weapon. At the elbow height, the figure is wrapped in a two-part robe flowing down. In front of the warrior's front leg, there lies a  $\Lambda$  letter and behind his back leg, there are horizontally placed letters  $\Lambda$ I.

References: Fröhlich 2012–2013, 14–17, no. 4/1; fig. 4: 1; 6a; 2016, 175, 185, fig. 9: 7; 12: 17; Kolníková 2012, 19, 95, 170, no. 105; fig. 8: 105; 83: 105; Militký 2016, 149, 150; Paulsen 1933, 141, no. 140; pl. 7: 140.

The coin has been found in the area of the Celtic production and trade centre near Němčice nad Hanou in Moravia, where an abundant numismatic (Kolníková 2012; Militký 2011–2012) and archaeological (Čižmář/Čižmářová/Meduna 2018; Čižmář/Kolníková 2006; Čižmář/Kolníková/Noeske 2008; Venclová 2016) material has been discovered. Currently, based



Fig. 1. Němčice nad Hanou, Prostějov distr. The 1/24 stater of the type bird-like featured head/warrior's figure (magnified). a – obverse; b – reverse.

on the archaeological finds, the chronology of the Němčice settlement is clearly attributed to stages LTB2–LTC2. However, the settlement did not continue there in the late La Tène period (Čižmář/Kolníková 2006, 267).

The Celtic coin belongs to a large group of Celtic Athena Alkis coinage. The group is named after an image of the Greek goddess – Athena Alkidemos – present at numerous older Hellenistic items (Fröhlich 2016, 179–183). Starting from the second third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE, the image became an inspiration for the entire group of gold and silver Celtic coins.

Interestingly, however, instead of the Athena Alkidemos image, the reverse of the 1/24 stater from Němčice (Fig. 1: b) is decorated with the warrior's figure precisely modelled on the goddess (Fröhlich 2012–2013, 11, note 1). Judging by the reverse of this stater fraction, it is assumed that such coins were minted starting from about 250 BCE (Fröhlich 2012–2013, 23–28; 2016, 183–186, fig. 12: 17; Militký 2016, 149, 150).

However, this type of coinage is interesting primarily due to the image on the obverse. The bird-like motif is exceptional in the Middle-Danube Celtic milieu – despite small bird-like decorative patterns being widespread there in the middle La Tène period (Čižmář 2012; Jandrasits 2003). 53 small bronze bird figurines were found only at the Němčice site (Čižmář 2012, 155–165, no. 8; 9; fig. 9–13). 20 further bird reliefs come from Lower Austria (Jandrasits 2012). Unfortunately, the chronological value of this specific archaeological material is low – diversity of finds and their technological features allow dating the bird sculptures roughly back to the LTC stage.

Unlike La Tène bronze animal figurines, some other archaeological artefacts provide significantly more precise chronological information. Particularly, among Celtic weaponry, swords – due to the complexity of construction and decoration details – show a sufficient variety of types and, thus, allow for a very precise chronological analysis.

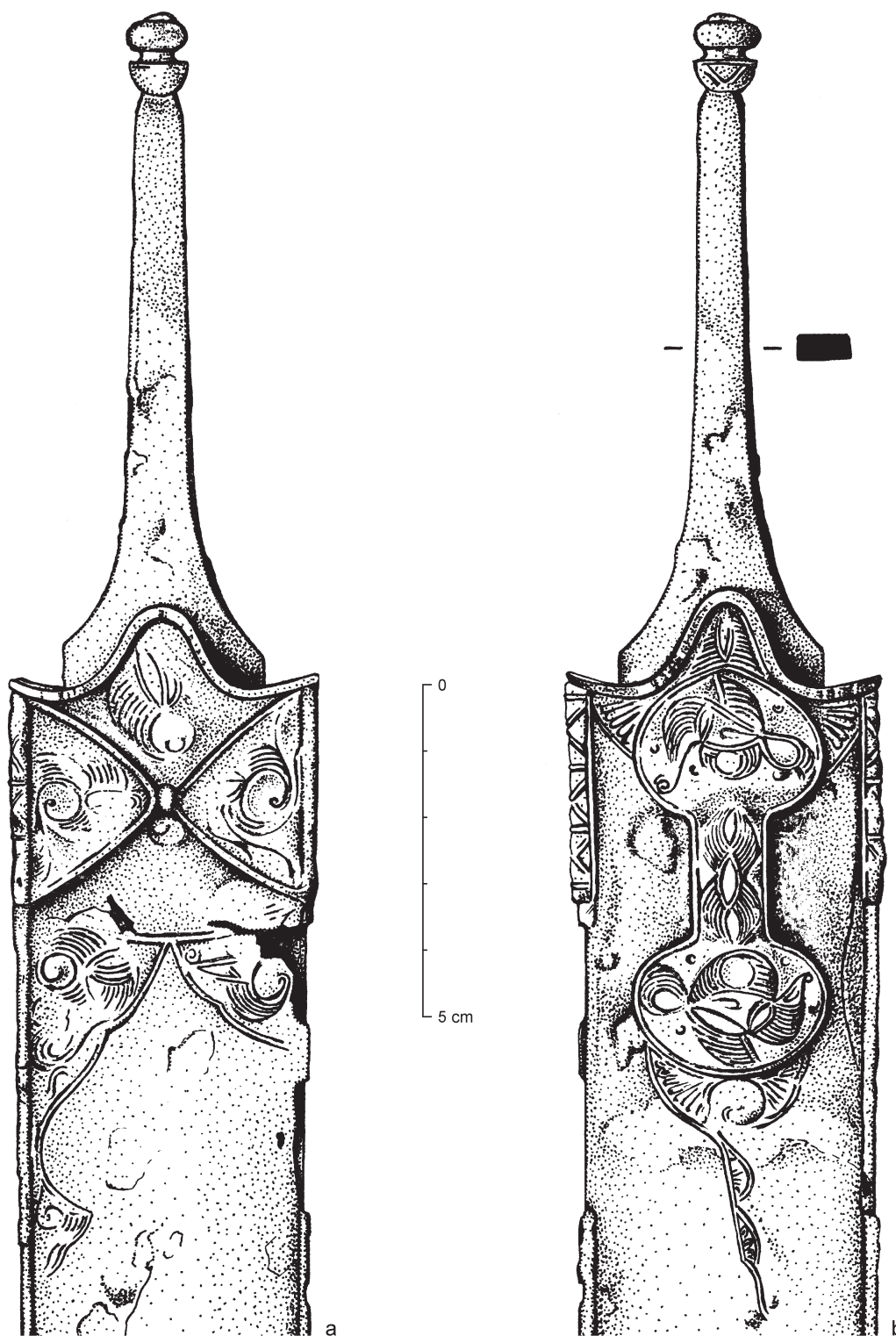


Fig. 2. The scabbard of the sword Drňa, Rimavská Sobota distr. a – front side of the upper part of the scabbard; b – back-side of the upper part of the scabbard (Zachar 1974, fig. 6).

The explanatory power of La Tène swords allows for artistic and chronological analysis of the bird motif on the obverse of the small Celtic coinage (Fig. 1). Currently, based on the image of the warrior on the reverse, but also based on the high –

98.5% – Au content in the alloy and the weight of this nominal unit, it is dated back to the beginning of the LTC1 stage, i.e. about the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE.

An iron sword with a scabbard found in an urn grave on a Halstatt and La Tène cemetery in



the 'Birinyi part' site to the south-east of the Drňa village, Rimavská Sobota distr., offers a good opportunity for visual comparisons with the obverse of the Celtic coinage (*Balaša 1963*).

The scabbard can be attributed to the Hungarian sword style. The exceptional preservation and decorative patterns of the scabbard – related to the construction details: locket, loop, clasp and chape – turned particular attention of an archaeologist, L. Zachar (1974, 73–78, fig. 6; 1987, 33, 34, 165, cat. 124; 125; fig. 124; 125).

The mouth of the scabbard (Fig. 2) resembles a butterfly with a small relief knot in the middle. The butterfly-like clasp on the scabbard of the sword from Drňa is characteristic for the turn of LTB and LTC stages. An important element of the scabbard from Drňa is its decoration. Decorative elements are concentrated on the front and back sides of the item. The front side – as well as the back one – was decorated with numerous techniques: hammering, engraving and embossing. The techniques give an impression of three-dimensionality and particular decorativeness as a characteristic feature of the Hungarian sword style. The basic decorative motif is a volute made of multiple lines (*Zachar 1974, 73–78, fig. 6*). Interestingly, although the ornaments are very distinctive, the backside of the scabbard, fastened to a belt with a loop, could not be seen by bystanders. The decoration, thus, was most likely 'private' and dedicated to the eyes of the owner of this magnificent weapon. However, the bird motif decorating the coin from Nĕmčice nad Hanou was by no means private (Fig. 1). Instead, it was made to allure as wide an audience as possible.

The analysis of the obverse of the gold coin from Nĕmčice could be considerably informed by decorative patterns on the scabbard backside of a sword from Drňa – particularly ornaments on flat parts of a loop (Fig. 2: b). The decoration of the backside of the scabbard comprises several motifs that form, similarly as on the front side, bundles of parallel lines. According to L. Zachar 'basic components of the decoration consist of zoomorphic motifs of birds on the loop neck, eight-shaped motif with a vertical, lenticular etching and finally also palmetto-shaped motifs around the throat and the below the lower plate' (*Zachar 1974, 75, fig. 6: b*). 'The comparison of the details on the scabbard from Drňa with decorations of Hungarian swords reveals that the item should be dated back the beginning of the LTC period' (*Zachar 1974, 76*). Also, at the same site in Drňa, another Celtic sword with a scabbard was found. However, around the opening, the scabbard is decorated with a dragon motif with a roof-shaped fitting suggesting that the item is older and should be attributed to the LTB stage.

The Hungarian sword style reflects the creativity of weapon manufacturers in the Carpathian Basin

in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE. This particular artefact, however, could be considered an import confirming cultural relations between the Carpathian Basin and Western Europe (*Zachar 1987, 35*).

Other transfers of knowledge and technology – most likely from central parts of France – contributed to the development of Central European coinage. Importantly, such transfers included the production of bimetallic coin dies that were composed of an iron hand and a bronze stamping insert. Most likely, however, such dies were imported to the Middle Danube Valley not directly from Western Europe but rather were brought by foreign groups of Celtic warriors returning home from looting expeditions in the Balkans after 280/279. Material evidence of such transfers is strengthened by a set of Celtic coin dies from Moravia (*Fröhlich 2017b*) and coin dies from a Celtic mint in Szalacska in South Hungary (*Gohl 1907*). It is believed that during their well-documented migrations, members of the Gallic tribe – Volcae-Tektosages – served as intermediaries in the process.

Zoomorphic bird motifs on the plates of the loop of the sword from Drňa (Fig. 2: b) and particularly the ornament decorating the bottom plate resemble the bird's head on the coin from Nĕmčice (Fig. 1: a).

The bird motif on the sword scabbard from Drňa (chronologically attributed to the LTC1 stage) and the head with bird-like features on the avers of the 1/24 stater from Nĕmčice nad Hanou – the figure on the reverse suggests that minting of such coins started about 250 BCE – corroborate archaeological and numismatic dating of both of those finds.

This conclusion is encouraging. Particularly, it seems that the analysis of artistic aspects of ancient coins – or the analysis of the stylistics of specific motifs – could inform relative and absolute chronology of ancient coins even when the context of the find is lacking.

The popularity of the headdress – with hair tied on the back of the neck and flowing down – reflects also in Celtic coins. In the Carpathian



Fig. 3. Hrhov, Rožňava distr. Reverse of a tetradrachma with an audoleon monogram (magnified; *Fröhlich 2017a, 35, 36, no. 28, 29*).

Basin, the headdress resembling the bird's head motif is present on the reverse of a tetradrachm found in a hoard comprising Celtic coins in Hrhov, Rožňava distr. (Fig. 3; *Fröhlich 2017a*, 35, 36, no. 28; 29). Similar stylised heads decorate other eastern Celtic tetradrachms, e.g. an equestrian on the reverse of the type-II (*Göbl 1973*, pl. 33: 408), *Baumreiter* tetradrachm (*Göbl 1973*, pl. 12: 129) and some other. However, in this case, the image depicts some headgear rather than a headdress.

## CONCLUSIONS

Without exaggerating, both described items could be considered to be the most representative examples of fine art in entire Celtic Europe. The La Tène sword

scabbard from Drňa is unique due to its impressive, innovative decorations and perfect artistic execution. The gold coin of the Paulsen 140 type is exceptional due to the mastery of the die manufacturer who managed to place all those perfectly stylised innovative features on the miniature surface of the coin.

The bird motif decorating the scabbard from Drňa and similar averse of 1/24 stater from Nĕmčice allows comparison of artistic aspects of both artefacts. The analysis suggests archaeological and numismatic dating of the finds to be correct.

The conclusion is encouraging. It seems that the artistic analysis of ancient coins – or stylistics of specific motifs – may inform relative and absolute chronology of ancient coins even when contextual information about the finds is absent.

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